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## Feds deny gas pipeline related to mustang roundup

BY FRANK X. MULLEN JR. • FMULLEN@RGJ.COM • JANUARY 31, 2010

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In the fight against removing large numbers of wild horses from the northwestern Nevada range, a proposed \$3 billion natural gas pipeline is at the front lines, critics of the roundups said.

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Activists who want the horses to stay on the range say the Ruby Pipeline project is the "smoking gun" that made federal officials decide to round up 2,500 horses this month from the desert about 100 miles north of Reno. The horses and burros will be sent to corrals and pastures in the Midwest and East.

Federal authorities and the pipeline firm denied the roundups have anything to do with the pipeline plan. Government officials said the horses would have been relocated even without the project because land and water resources can't sustain large numbers of mustangs.

Ginger Kathrens, executive director of the Cloud Foundation, a wild horse advocacy group, said speculation about the roots of the latest mustang roundup came from a February 2009 environmental document about the pipeline that stated the Bureau of Land Management will work with the pipeline company to "minimize wild horse and burro grazing along the restored (right-of-way) for three years. Possible management actions would be to ... reduce wild horse populations following BLM policy in appropriate management areas."

Executives of the El Paso Corporation, which would build and own the pipeline, have said they don't support the roundups. In an e-mail to the Cloud Foundation last week, the firm said it has no interest in the removal of wild horses.

"But it's a \$3 billion project, so what are a few wild horses, pronghorn antelope, pigmy rabbits and sage grouse compared to that?" Kathrens said. "There's so much money at stake here, I think it's entirely possible that the pipeline and the roundup are cause and effect."

She said that even if the project, which is expected to begin construction this spring, isn't related to the roundups, the construction of the 675-mile pipeline across one of the most pristine and environmentally-

### BLM WILD HORSE ROUNDUP

- To date, the helicopter roundup has captured 1,447 horses of the 2,500 scheduled to be removed from the range about 100 miles north of Reno.
  - Of those captured, 26 horses have died, 20 mares have suffered spontaneous abortions and about 25 horses are being treated for injuries and lameness sustained in the roundup or for other health conditions.
  - The horses will be processed in a holding facility near Fallon which now contains 1,322 animals. They eventually will be shipped to corrals and pastures in the Midwest or East.
  - The federal government plans to remove about 12,000 wild horses and burros from the range this year. About 34,200 wild horses are in captivity and 37,000 remain on the range. The government's appropriate management level for the horses is set at 26,600.
- Source: Bureau of Land Management

### THE RUBY PIPELINE

The proposed \$3 billion Ruby Pipeline would cross Nevada 145 miles north of Reno. The pipeline, 42 inches in diameter, could transport 1.5 billion cubic feet of natural gas a day from Wyoming to customers in Oregon. The line would run across some of the most remote and pristine areas of the state. If approved, construction would begin this spring.

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